

Editorial: Give charter schools time to succeed

A lawsuit threatens to kill Washington's push into charter schools before those schools can demonstrate what benefits they can provide for students and parents.

Seattle Times Editorial

WHILE Washington's push into charter schools is still in the early stages, the state Supreme Court should allow those schools to prove how effective they can be.

Voters approved charter schools in 2012. First Place Scholars, an elementary school in Seattle, opened in September as the state's first charter school. It caters to students dealing with homelessness and other issues — children who struggle to thrive in traditional public schools.

Last week, the state's high court heard arguments in a lawsuit brought by a coalition of teachers, parents and community groups wanting to end the new charter system. The court could take several months to issue a decision, which could derail this important venture into charter schools — and that should be avoided.

Plaintiffs in the lawsuit contend that the charter-school law violates Article IX of the state's Constitution, which reads: "The legislature shall provide for a general and uniform system of public schools." Opponents argue that charter schools are not subject to control by voters or the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, among other concerns.

State Attorney General Bob Ferguson said the lawsuit is an attempt to "override the will of Washington's voters based on an extreme, antiquated approach to Article IX."

Studies have shown that charter schools on average perform on par with traditional public schools, [according to research group the Rand Corporation](#). What makes charter schools appealing is that they aim to disrupt the status quo, challenge long-held beliefs and nurture innovation.

Nationwide, charter schools tend to take a year or longer to start showing student progress. Over time, students who attended charter schools are more likely to graduate from high school and go to college than their public-school counterparts, according to the Rand study.

In Washington, the majority of voters made it clear they want to give charter schools the opportunity to succeed.

The state's education system is in the midst of large-scale change due to the Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary ruling, which requires the state to more fully fund basic education.

This is an extraordinary time of reinvention and investment for Washington's education system. Charter schools, which can offer students and parents better options and approaches to learning, should be a part of that.

This state needs stronger schools overall. If charter schools can help students otherwise marginalized in the traditional system that translates into a gain for Washington.

Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, Blanca Torres, Robert J. Vickers, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).